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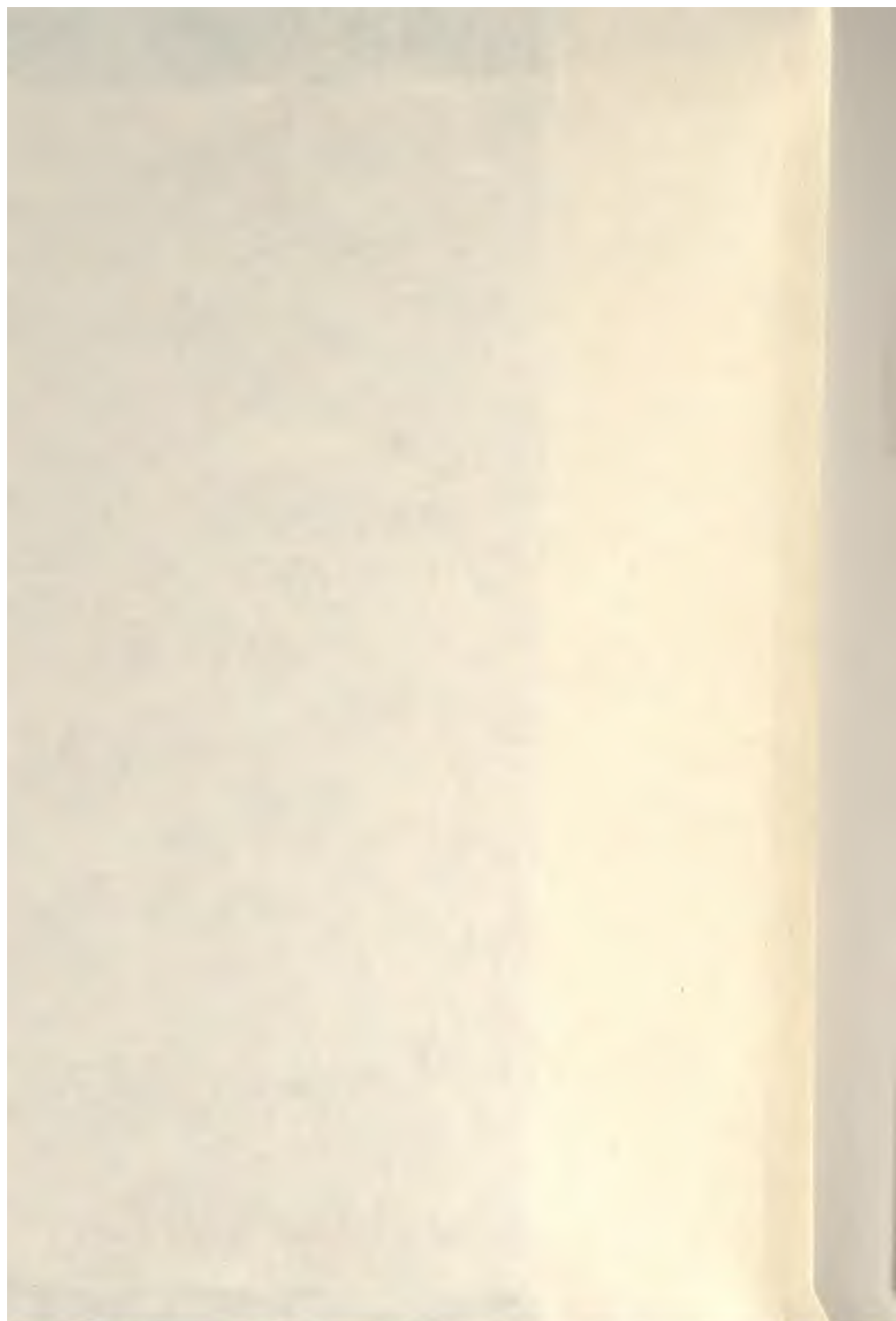
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JEWS AND JUDAISM.

AN ADDRESS

BY

MORRIS JASTROW, JR., PH. D.

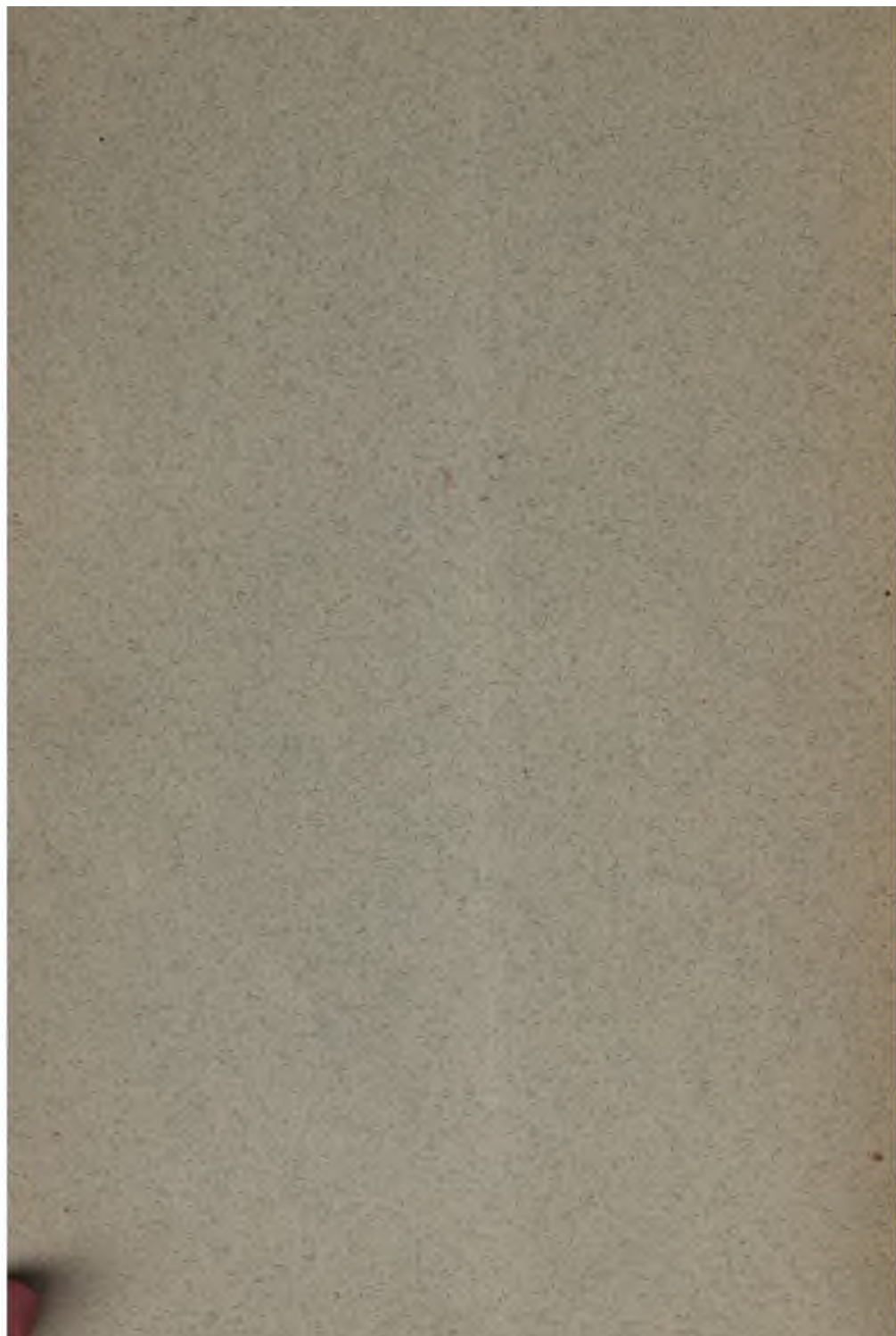
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THE task which I have taken upon myself this morning, or perhaps it would be more correct to say, which circumstances impose upon me, is, I feel it, a difficult one. I do not refer to the fact that the term of office for which I was elected and accepted the position of Lecturer in this congregation, being about to expire, and having declined a re-election, I stand here for the last time in my official capacity. It was for very definite reasons that I accepted the trust when, without the least solicitation on my part, it was offered me, and it is for equally definite reasons that I now feel myself impelled to relinquish it. Except to give expression to the natural pang of regret one feels at severing any relations which have been of a pleasant nature, and to the promptings of appreciation towards those who have harbored the very best of intentions, this is not a subject to be touched upon here. But it would be an injustice both to you and myself were I to part without indicating, as clearly and plainly as I can, my views on a subject in which we are all, no matter where we stand, interested, if not concerned—one that surely needs all the light that can be thrown upon it, from whatever quarter it comes—namely, Jews and Judaism, or, more precisely, the relation in which the two stand to one another. It is to this task that I have reference, and you will agree with me that to speak of Jews and Judaism *is* a difficult task. It is also a delicate one, and were it not that it would be more than cowardly to shrink from a duty, no matter how difficult and delicate it be, I would probably not have chosen to discuss this subject from this spot. Naturally, the views which I am about to unfold will not be shared—at least in their entirety—by the honored leader of this congregation, but this is, if anything, one reason more why there should be no doubt as to my own position, and the close personal relation in which I stand to your guide raises this duty to a necessity. The esteem in which he stands he has gained for himself through his sincerity

and absolute fidelity to his convictions, and I am sure he would think less of any of his kin were he or she to do aught but follow in turn the dictates of conscience. It is neither a wrong, shame or misfortune for a son to differ from his father, either in matters of religion or anything else; but it is a wrong, shame and misfortune if this be the case, not to say so. I have never concealed, neither before nor after accepting the position in this congregation, my views, as little as I have endeavored to press them upon you. But I have striven when, on former occasions, I felt obliged to give expression to them, to do so in a reverent and respectful spirit, and I shall endeavor to do so this morning.

"The state of Judaism," it has lately been said, "calls for reflection, not for condemnation." That it presents problems, serious and weighty problems, to earnest and thinking minds can only be questioned or denied by those unaccustomed to or incapable of serious and earnest thought. Nor can the discussion of these problems be evaded if we desire to obtain, either for our own peace of soul or for a larger circle, a satisfactory solution of them. The breaking out of divisions is, no doubt, to be regretted, and I for one can well understand the voices raised, which appeal for unity and the urgent calls to bury differences for the sake of peace. But it is a serious error to mistake stillness for harmony, calm for peace, silence for acquiescence. Not only is there a stillness "as of death," and a calm foreboding a storm, there is also a silence, which springs from an indifference due to a feeling of despair or disgust, and not an indifference due to a lack of interest. It is one of the most hopeful signs of the present that cold indifference to religious affairs is yielding slowly, but I believe gradually, not only among the Jews—who but reflect the spirit of the times in this respect—but in general to a recognition that we cannot *afford* to regard with indifference a matter which involves our own present and the future of our children. But it is necessary to distinguish between controversy and discussion, between wrangling quarrels and calm debates. People are tired and very naturally so of the never-ending quarrels about unimportant trifles, while the main

issue is not brought forward. They have grown weary of the perpetual bickerings and sneers, of the imputing of dishonorable motives to opponents, of the haughty tone which declares, "I alone am right and you are altogether wrong." And what is saddest of all, during all this time most precious opportunities are lost. Such methods remind one forcibly of the story told of the hunters, who were discussing the qualities of the deer they hoped to catch. While they were quarrelling among themselves, the deer whizzed by and—out of sight. Some years ago, in speaking of Jews and Judaism, we could still point to the rising generation of American Jews and paint in vivid colors the hopes we placed in them. That generation has risen and is before us. It will not do to console ourselves by putting off our hopes to a still further future. It is with the present that we have to deal. Earnest discussion, however, and calm debate is always in place, is what we sadly need to-day, and is in itself already a contribution towards that positive work, which we ought ever to have in view. It is in this sense—not in a spirit of controversy, which is utterly repugnant to me, but in the hope that my words may aid to some extent, however small, in clearing the situation that I now ask the question, of what nature are the differences that divide Jews to-day, for that behind all that we see going on around us there lurk differences however concealed they may be through quarrels and controversies, so admirably adapted to hide the real issue, no one can, no one will doubt?

I include under the term Jew not only those who have identified themselves with any synagogue or congregation, or who take a more or less active part in charitable and other institutions founded by Jews—a very important part of religion—but all those who lay claim, by the mere accident of birth, to the name. This definition is not without its importance, for it warns us not to put a too narrow interpretation upon the term. The same warning applies to the use of the word Judaism. There is of course, as we shall presently see, such a thing as a too wide interpretation of it, but there is also a too narrow interpretation, and while we should

try to be as exact as we can, it is better to err on the wider side than on the other, which consists in using it in a too restricted sense. If for the sake of illustration, I may introduce terms with which we cast about so liberally, what do we mean, or let me rather ask, what should we mean, when we call a man Orthodox, say of another that he is Conservative and of a third, that he is a Radical? These terms meet our gaze continually in the press, resound from pulpits, or are heard in homes, but a clear definition of them is rarely attempted, much less furnished. It is of course possible that the terms base upon sentiment. I mean to say that they *can* be used in a sense which would make it depend upon the personal feelings, and not strictly logical beliefs of a man whether he identifies himself with the one or the other wing. I say, I do not deny the possibility of such an interpretation of the terms. But I do say if this be the case among American Jews, let us know it. If all the differences consequently that exist among us refer merely to a few forms and ceremonies, more or less, and if the question of these forms and ceremonies is a mere matter of feeling and sentiment, then by all means, let it be clearly stated. But if this be all, I am afraid that we have been enacting a comedy of "Much Ado About Nothing" that would be ridiculous, were it not lamentable. If, as would appear from recent official utterances, the whole question hinges upon the introduction of the organ, or family pews, the removal of hats, a few prayers more or less, why then, let positions on these questions be clearly taken, but whether it is worth while to wage a forty years' war over such questions at the loss of many golden opportunities for doing some positive good, or whether the result can in any case be of sufficient importance to merit a song of triumph, or a funeral dirge, is another question, which I have no hesitation whatever in answering in the negative. It is possible that at the opening of what is commonly known as the Reform movement, the word was understood in the narrower sense as involving merely a change of *forms*, leaving all doctrines, teachings, principles and even traditions entirely undisturbed. Whether this be so or not, it is certain that if there is any meaning to be

attached at all to the terms Orthodoxy and Reform, as applied to Jews of to-day, they must refer to something else, or rather something more than is implied in a strictly etymological interpretation of the word "reform." Reform in this sense has been carried out long ago, if not in practice, at least in theory. The abuses against which the pioneers of the Reform movement fought, have ceased in all intelligent Jewish communities at least, and in unintelligent congregations they still continue without regard to the length or shortness of the prayers, whether an organ has been introduced or not. But apart from this, it may safely be asserted that there is no congregation in this country, at all worthy of the name, that has not modified its forms to some extent during the past forty years. Absolute Conservatism does not exist, and as far as America is concerned, the introduction of organs and family pews, or even the hat question no longer forms the distinguishing mark between Orthodoxy and Reform, certainly not between Conservatism and Radicalism. It is entirely unnecessary to work one's self up to an uncontrollable pitch of excitement to take up the cudgel for Reform in the narrower sense. There is no call for attacking a dead giant. It certainly does not require much courage or great abilities. No! I hold that if there be any differences dividing Jews to-day—I say Jews and not Judaism—these differences must have reference to *divergent religious convictions*. It is here alone that dividing lines can be drawn and in order to reach a clear view of the situation *must* be sharply drawn.

We often hear it stated that Judaism has no dogmas. Let us be careful how we use terms. Nothing adds more to confusion of ideas than loose definitions. If by dogmas we mean speculations concerning matters in regard to which certainty can never be reached, and which, therefore, require a certain amount, no matter how small, of pure faith, then we are justified in saying that Judaism has no dogmas. True, there have been times when such speculations have freely been indulged in by those professing Judaism. Indeed, it may be said that there has never been a time in the history of Judaism, or any other religion, when such specu-

lations were entirely absent, for man, in his insatiable thirst to fathom the mysteries of existence, has always endeavored to bridge over the gap between the finite and the infinite in some way. Everyone who thinks, tries to solve the problems of life in a manner satisfactory to himself, if not to others. That is an inherent trait in man, and has nothing to do with any particular form of religion. But such speculations in regard to the soul, in regard to good and evil, in regard to a future life, and even in regard to God, have never formed an essential feature of Judaism. It is also true that attempts have been made to formulate a creed in Judaism. The great Maimonides was the first to do it, but neither his nor any other has ever been universally adopted or declared binding upon Jews. If, however, by dogmas we mean certain fundamental principles upon which a religion rests, then it is simply absurd to say that Judaism has no dogmas. No religion can exist without dogmas in this sense. Even irreligion has its dogmas. Atheism, no less than Agnosticism, sets up certain principles, even if they be but negative in their character. What is true is, that Judaism, as a religion, is not DOGMATIC in its character. It has always laid far more stress upon practice than upon theory; it has always been more a way of living than a theory of life. But it is also theoretical. Its theories, it is true, have their outcome in action, and were never mere speculations, indulged in as a pure abstraction, but they were theories, after all. If we object to the term dogma, let us say principles, tenets, doctrines, or what not? It is of no consequence which word we employ, but what we must not lose sight of is that Judaism, as the term has heretofore been understood, has certain doctrines or principles, or whatever name you may please to employ. It may be difficult to give an exact definition of Judaism in *precise* terms, but, for all that, it must be something definite. Though one may not know exactly what it stands for, it must stand for *something*, and cannot be employed promiscuously for anything or everything our fancy or caprice may dictate. I lay stress upon this point, for, simple as it may appear, it is frequently lost sight of, and the loose way in

which the term Judaism is used contributes its share—a very large one—to that confusion which is one of the most characteristic traits of the present state of the question concerning the relation of Jews to Judaism. You may believe what you please, but you have no right to define Judaism as you please. I shall come back to this presently. In the collection of legends and tales known as the Midrash, there is a story told to illustrate the peculiar hospitality of the wicked inhabitants of Sodom. It is said that they had a room, containing a bed of a certain size, which they placed at the disposal of strangers. If the bed was too short, they cut off the stranger's legs until he could accommodate himself to it; if it was too long, they stretched the stranger's limbs. It is much in the same way that Judaism is treated to-day. We stretch it or shorten it to suit our convenience; we fashion it according to our views. Now, I do not believe that we are *obliged* to fashion our views according to it, but we are certainly not justified in compounding any mixture we choose and labelling it Judaism. It is because of this pernicious habit of defining Judaism in an arbitrary fashion that we are making such little, if any, headway in the solution of the problems before us. Every man means something else when he says "Judaism." No wonder that it becomes something vague and indeterminate; no wonder that finally nobody knows exactly what it means, because it is used for anything and everything.

I have said it is better to make our interpretation of it too wide rather than too narrow, but I repeat there is such a thing as a *too wide* interpretation, so wide, that it becomes "vague and indeterminate." I may have erred in this particular myself. If so, I am perfectly ready to acknowledge my error. But the experience of *only* one year, combined with as careful thought and observation as I am capable of, has convinced me that we are on the wrong road, that this loose interpretation of a term, which is if not perfectly definite, at least moderately definite in its character, must *cease*, if we wish to understand the real issue before us. In order to understand the relation of Jews to Judaism, we must for the

moment sharply distinguish between the two. What Judaism is, is one thing, what modern Jews believe or do not believe is another. The two factors may cover one another, but they also may not. If they do, well and good; if not, there is still the question, what is to be done? But it certainly increases the difficulty of the situation if we try to force Judaism to our views, just as it is wrong to do violence to our convictions, if they do not coincide with what has been heretofore known as Judaism. Our point of view then must not be subjective only, but objective as well. Subject and object, Jews and Judaism, to repeat, *may* equal one another, but they also may not. At any rate, we must understand both.

Interpreting Judaism in a wide rather than in a narrow sense, it still stands for something very definite. The idea of one God, or in other words, the unity of creation, a force from which all emanates, must be left out of the question, for it no longer forms a distinguishing mark of Judaism. To Judaism belongs the eternal glory of having been the first to grasp this great idea in its grandeur. But from Judaism, others have learned it, and while they did not maintain it in its pristine purity, mixing it with foreign elements, we see during the last centuries a gradual progress among the adherents of Christianity towards the purer conception of the Jewish prophets until in our own days, in the official utterances of Unitarianism, and in the unofficial but equally forcible utterances of the representatives of other denominations, monotheism in its purest form and sense is adopted as an essential feature of other religions besides Judaism. But the acknowledgment of the authority of the Bible as being a Divine Revelation *has* formed hitherto a distinguishing mark of Judaism. You may interpret revelation as widely as you please, but you cannot leave it out of view when speaking of Judaism, I again add, *as that term has hitherto been understood*. You may explain the method of Revelation as you please, but you must be careful not to explain it *away*. It is a convenient method frequently resorted to by those who argue against Revelation to give the very crudest conception of it, and hold that up as the only one possible. I do not do this. It is by no means necessary in order

to believe in Revelation to suppose that God came down on Mount Sinai and gave Moses two tablets of stone, but I do hold that if you remove the *supernatural* character of it, you have no longer Revelation in the sense in which that term has hitherto been understood. If you continue to use the term without stating clearly that what you mean by it is something entirely different, *essentially* different, then you are contributing to the confusion which is so strongly to be condemned. You may be as wide as you please in your definition, but withal within certain limits. The line, it seems to me, must be drawn between the natural and supernatural.

In close connection with this stands the question concerning the divine origin and authority of the Bible. Again, I say, interpret the term "divine origin and authority" as widely as you please, but you have no right to interpret it away. I am not of those who believe that the acceptance of modern views of the Bible lowers its value in our eyes. No! Its value for me does not depend upon the question of its origin and its parts, but lies somewhere else, in a region where these questions do not enter. Nor do I fear that it will become lost. Mankind cannot do without the Bible, because it is a reflection of mankind. But I go further, and say the acceptance of modern views does not at all necessarily involve the abandoning of the belief in its divine authority or even origin. We have instances in our days of persons who cling firmly to its authority, aye, and yet accept the results of the much-abused Biblical criticism. But if we do not accept the Bible as our authority, *we must distinctly say so*. To go on theoretically acknowledging it as such and contradicting ourselves in practice, is again a contribution to confusion. Here is another doctrine, which has hitherto been considered fundamental in Judaism. In order to know exactly what differences divide Jews to-day, what is our relation towards Judaism, we must make clear what has *heretofore* been understood under Judaism. It is only then that we can know how far our views are in accord with it or not.

There is one more doctrine to which I desire to allude, and which, it appears to me, has been held to be essential to Judaism, I add once

more, as hitherto understood, and that is that the Jews are a chosen people. Let us again interpret it in its widest sense. To draw the conclusion that, because we consider ourselves an elect people, we therefore deem ourselves better than others, or are even obliged to hold ourselves aloof from others, is not warranted. That is a too narrow interpretation of the term. But to say, on the other hand, that every people has its mission—the Greeks to develop the idea of beauty, the Romans, that of law, and the like, and that the Jews, also, have theirs, not only leaves the term “vague and indeterminate,” but is too wide. It makes mission equal to purpose. To say that the Jews serve their purpose, is simply equivalent to saying that everything serves some purpose. It needs only a glance at history to see the purpose, and a very important one they have served, but I do not think that that was all that was meant when we have hitherto spoken of Israel's mission. This, too, is a doctrine on which we must be clear. If we understand something else by the term mission, let us say so, but let us recognize that it is something essentially different from what has hitherto been understood by the term. There is another doctrine which might be mentioned, but about which there is a legitimate doubt whether it is essential to traditional Judaism—I mean that referring to a restoration of the Jews to Palestine. It is rather strange that this belief, which has grown so very weak in our days, should be held by our friends of other denominations to be one of the most characteristic traits of the Jews. Only the other day an eminent statesman of this country, and a true friend of the Jews, in an address, spoke of this matter as though his audience—composed of modern American Jews—were earnestly hoping and sighing for a return. I need not touch upon this, because as stated it is doubtful whether it is essential even to Judaism as hitherto understood. Let me only protest against the charge so frequently heard that Jews who believe in a return to Palestine cannot be good citizens of this or any other country. Not only do examples such as the late Sir Moses Montefiore prove the contrary, but there is no more reason why such a Jew, who clings with heart and

soul to this belief, should not be loyal to the land in which he dwells, any more than to use the illustration employed by an eminent English statesman, when the civil disabilities of the Jews were discussed, one who believes the world will come to an end at a certain period, should for that reason be supposed to take no interest in his surroundings and no part in the work of the present. On the contrary, the Jew who *conscientiously* believes in a restoration, also believes that the better he fulfils his duties in the present the more effectively he will hasten the realization of his hopes which he puts in the distant future.

Whether I have exhausted the essential doctrines of Judaism as a special religion in mentioning Revelation, the Divine authority of the Bible, and the Divine mission of Israel, or not, it will not be denied that these doctrines have been included under the term Judaism as hitherto understood, and in the sense which I have attached to them. Here we have something definite. What has been given may not be all of Judaism, but it is an essential part of it—a definite part of it. It is something by which we can measure the extent to which our views accord or do not accord with *what has hitherto been understood under Judaism*. Now, the question is, have the differences which exist among modern Jews, let us say especially of this country, though the same holds good of others, as Germany, France, England, and the like, where the same influences have been at work, have they reference only to different *interpretations* of the doctrines which have been enunciated, or do they go beyond this? To put the question still plainer, are we divided simply upon a wider or narrower interpretation of the doctrines of Revelation, Divine Authority of the Bible, Divine Mission of the Jews, or have we religious convictions on these points, which in *essential* particulars, diverge from those hitherto held by those professing Judaism as hitherto understood. This, it seems to me, is the *real issue*. This is the question which individuals and congregations must settle before any headway can be made. It appears to me that the interpretations which have been put upon the three doctrines under discussion by some of those representing radical

views, all come under the category too wide—so wide as to be vague and indeterminate, so wide as to practically interpret them *away*. It is certainly high time if this be the case that it should be *distinctly* said. It is all very well to boast of our liberal views, but unless there is a bottom to them, they avail nothing. You cannot build up a religion on mere phrases, and if you use terms in a loose or confused way, you are indulging in empty words. The great weakness of the Reform movement lies in its negative character, and it will not become positive until it adopts some positive basis. Mere opposition to orthodoxy is not a sufficient mainstay nor a sufficient reason for its existence. Things are in a sad state, you say. Believe me, friends, they will grow worse, as long as we do not find out *exactly where we stand*. Let us come to a definite understanding of what has hitherto been understood as Judaism, and let us also find out definitely, at least as definitely as we can, what *we* believe. Then having done this, we can draw a comparison between the two—between Jews and Judaism.

I have said that congregations must settle this question, namely, whether they adhere to the doctrines of Judaism as hitherto understood, or whether they hold religious convictions which diverge from them. There are two questions which may be asked: first, of what great importance is it, whether this question be settled or not? The chief object of Judaism, which is to direct us how to lead good honorable lives, is not affected thereby. You can be a good man—which is equivalent to being a good Jew,—it may be said, no matter what opinions you hold on the question of Revelation, Divine Authority of the Bible and the Divine Mission of the Jews. Certainly, I say, the chief aim of Judaism is and has always been to be a guide for our conduct in life. But it is just because of this, that the question is of the very highest importance. It is just because Judaism *cannot* influence our lives, as long as these essential points are not made clear, that we must *insist*, no matter at what sacrifice, upon reaching a clear understanding of them. The first thing, the thing more than any other demanded of a religious guide is that it be followed and consistently followed.

Now, the most flagrant and the most unfortunate feature of Judaism to-day is the awful break between theory and practice. Theoretically, congregations stand upon the *traditional* basis of Judaism, and practically they have broken loose from it. Theoretically, the Divine Authority of the Bible, or at any rate the authority of the Bible is assumed, and practically we care little or nothing about. Theoretically, the Sabbath is maintained, and practically it is not. Theoretically, doctrines are held, but the practical consequences that necessarily and consistently flow from them are not drawn. How can a religion possibly influence us, if such a rupture exists between theory and practice, and this rupture is naught but the consequence of the lack of clearness on the part of congregations and individuals where they *really* stand.

If you set up certain premises, you must draw the conclusions from them. The premises without the conclusions are useless. Imagine yourself in the place of a teacher, who is to lead such a congregation that sets up premises, but does not draw the conclusions. Suppose him to be an honest and sincere man. If he accepts the responsible position of leading a congregation, it is assumed that the stand of the congregation is also his platform. I will not speak of the fact that he has only an opportunity of meeting his congregation two or three times a year, and can, therefore, exert but little influence upon their conduct and upon their souls. But how can he impart profitable religious instruction at all if he is not allowed to draw the practical consequences of the views which he is expected to hold, and which his congregation formally represents? What must his position be in regard to such a question as the Sabbath? Should he teach the children the laws of the Sabbath, and then let them ask their parents why they do not observe them? or should he say that business considerations make it impossible? To what an awful pass must a religion have come that is forced to make such a sacrifice of consistency. You cannot make a compromise with your religious convictions. Either the Sabbath is to be observed, or it is not. If you believe it to be a law required by an authority which you acknowledge as binding, then you *must*

fulfil it at any rate as best you can. If you do not acknowledge this authority, then *say so*. But if there is one thing which any religion (and Judaism perhaps more than any other, because it is to such a great degree practical) cannot tolerate, it is ambiguity. Inconsistency must be attended with dire results. If a minister wishes to be sincere, and is in earnest, he can neither avoid nor evade these questions. He must be able to teach with a pure and easy conscience, and he cannot do that if either he or his congregation must make a sacrifice of consistency or truth. You must have some basis for a religion. I care not what it is, but there must be something on which you can rear a structure. For this reason, your theory and practice must harmonize, a break between the two must prove fatal to a religion.

Let me come to the second question. Have congregations, it will be asked, the right to declare where they stand? Are not Jewish Congregations bound to a certain position? Are they not formed to maintain Judaism as *hitherto understood* and nothing else? The answer to this is, that, whether we like it or not, it is a fact that Jewish Congregations, as well as those of other denominations who have no authoritative body, are perfectly independent. Even if we had an authoritative body, that would not prevent the formation of independent bodies, as we see daily by the number of independent churches springing up. I say it is a fact, whether we like it or not. But I see no reason why we should not like it. If we believe in the development of religious thought, we must allow it a means of developing, and that can only be done by granting the utmost liberty to the individual and to the community. True, this may result in divisions and even ruptures, but this is far better than a forced unnatural union. Congregations then being formed by individuals of their own accord, they have a right to unite on whatever grounds they choose. If Jewish congregations adopt traditional Judaism—Judaism as the term has hitherto been understood—well and good. If not, they have still a perfect right to unite, but they must state precisely upon what basis they unite. They will then recognize how far

their religious convictions do or do not accord with Judaism as hitherto understood. To call themselves Reform or Radical Reform, however, is saying nothing whatever because no one knows exactly what is understood by those terms and everyone understands something different. Let them state what they believe and act in accordance with what follows from the premises they set up. But you will say, is not the minister there for that purpose? Is he not there to lead the congregation? Yes; but the congregation must know whither they want, and whither they are going to be led. They are not a set of innocent lambs, to follow blindly their shepherd. No! I say a minister has no right to lead a congregation away from the road which they wish to take, or think they are taking. A minister who does this, is there under false pretences, just as on the other hand, a minister fails in his duty if he yields to any pressure which involves a departing from the principles he holds, and the congregation pretends to hold, and—I lay stress upon this—the consequences that follow from these principles. A minister is not and ought not be employed to *change* the basis on which a congregation stands, or is supposed to stand, or believes to stand, or pretends to stand. He certainly has no right to attempt this, whether in one direction or the other, without stating clearly, and so plainly that there can be no doubt about it, what his intentions are. A minister and his congregation must know and understand each other thoroughly; otherwise he cannot influence them nor they be benefited by him. It will not do for them to have different standpoints and if they have the same standpoints, they must also agree as to the conclusions to be drawn from them, and what is more, *they must both draw them*. A minister's example is as important as his words. In fact, you have always a right to judge a man by his acts rather than by what he says. For this reason, the most absolute sincerity and consistency is essential, if a minister is to influence those coming under his charge. He must not be expected to do anything merely for the sake of appearances, and, if expected, must *refuse*.

The duty therefore devolves upon both leaders and congregations

to find out where they stand. If there are any differences dividing us, they ought to have reference to different religious convictions. On the ground of conviction, and not of policy, a stand and a firm one must be taken. It is no disgrace nor even a misfortune if we hold convictions which differ from those hitherto held by those professing Judaism, once more adding, as *hitherto understood*; but it is a positive disgrace and worse than a misfortune, if we do not know wherein we differ, or, knowing, do not say so. Differences in religious convictions, if only the convictions be honestly and clearly held, in no way lead to hostility, enmity or quarrels. It is only when there is confusion and inconsistency that we will have controversy instead of discussion, quarrels instead of arguments, mutual hostility instead of mutual respect. If you find two persons assailing each other, calling each other names, descending to personal attacks, you may depend upon it, either both are wrong, or neither is clear. You can always distinguish one who has clear and honest convictions from one who has not. The former will always entertain the highest respect for and speak in terms of the highest reverence of the convictions of others; the latter has only a haughty sneer, or an insulting word for his opponent. These quarrels and controversies, of which we have grown weary, will not, cannot cease until a stop is put, by congregations declaring where *they stand*, to the confusion at present prevailing. "Peace, peace," cries the old Jewish prophet, "but there is no peace." There will be none until the rupture between theory and practice, which is growing worse day by day, will be healed, not through a compromise, but through a consistent following of the convictions we hold, whatever they be. You ask how? I repeat by finding out what we believe, and acting in accordance with our beliefs.

In no other way, as far as I can see, can it be done. Our point of view, must be convictions and not *policy*. Our motto, consistency, and not accommodation. I revere Judaism, sincerely revere it. I love its past and admire it for what it has accomplished. But there is something still higher to me than Judaism, and that is conscience. Your first and most sacred duty is towards your conscience. There

should be no higher master for you than it. If your convictions, your honest and clear convictions, reached after the best thought you are capable of, lead you in a direction diverging from the path of what has hitherto been understood under Judaism, you are bound—bound I say by the laws of traditional Judaism—to follow what you hold to be right. I believe that it is no paradox to say that such a man is a better Jew than one who countenances a clash between theory and practice, who sacrifices on the altar of accommodation or policy what he holds to be true, even if *externally* he clings to practices which have hitherto been identified with Judaism.

It is not essential whether what you hold to be the truth is really correct or not. But it is essential that you follow what you hold to be true. You must do it, if you wish to be honest. We must not only love truth, but have the most absolute confidence in it. Whither it points, we must go. Where it leads, we can safely follow. I say, therefore, if congregations no longer accept the essential doctrines of Judaism in the sense in which they have hitherto been understood, it is neither a crime nor a misfortune, but let them say so, and if this be the case, do that which follows logically from the position they have taken. Let them not, however, halt between two opinions or sail under false colors.

From the point of view of conviction and not of policy or accommodation, all those questions which now agitate American Jews must be judged. In discussing, for example, such a question as that concerning a day of rest, let us not ask, can it be kept, but must it be kept on the seventh day? If you acknowledge the authority of the Bible in the sense in which the term authority has hitherto been understood, there is no question whatever but it must be kept, and you must do it, at least as well as you possibly can. If you do *not* believe in this authority, by your honest convictions do not hold the Bible of divine origin and authority, as the terms have hitherto been understood, then you must say so, and—I lay stress upon this—*act accordingly*. It is not a question of transferring Saturday to Sunday, it is a question of convictions. The

same applies to other questions, for instance that of prayer. It is wrong and if not wrong, certainly of no positive value or good to abolish a prayer because it is too long or too short, or for a similar reason. Define first, exactly what you *mean* by prayer, what kind of prayers you believe in, and then act. Have only such prayers as accord with your *convictions*. We must neither abolish for the pleasure of abolishing nor introduce an innovation because it is new. But we *must* abolish what contradicts our beliefs, because it would be an inconsistency to maintain it. We have no choice but to make an innovation if in turn our convictions call for it. And so with the other questions. It is equally wrong, it appears to me, to make the preservation of Judaism the only criterion by which to measure our acts. Sincerely as we may feel attached to Judaism, that would again be committing the mistake of exchanging convictions for policy. Deeply as I myself revere Judaism, I say the first standard is our own religious convictions. We must follow them first. If Judaism will be preserved thereby, well and good. If not, I still say we must be honest. There may be many who argue thus: if this or that be done or not done, Judaism will perish. Are we not, when we speak thus, entirely too much concerned about Judaism, too little about ourselves? The life and death of Judaism, it has well been said, and I share the sentiment, does not depend upon our adherence to it. There are far more powerful influences at work, going to undermine or strengthen a religion. Judaism, I add, will survive if it *deserves* to survive, and in my mind there is no doubt but that the best of Judaism is immortal. But we need have no hesitation in saying that if Judaism can only survive at a sacrifice of conscience, of what we hold to be right and true, then it will perish and *must* perish, no matter whether we adhere to it or not. Unless we are to have faith in the dictates of our conscience, I know not in what we should trust. Again we hear, if this or that be done, Jews will lose their identity, I for my part do not believe they will. I believe that in a hundred years from now, we will be Jews as we are Jews to-day, whether we like it or not, if for no other reason simply because others will

consider us Jews. But I say that even if this fear be justified, we are still commanded to be honest, to cling to what we hold to be true, and follow unflinchingly what we deem the right. Nothing that we may do in obedience to the dictates of conscience can make us revere and appreciate our past less, even if we do not *accept* it in its entirety. Nothing that we may do in following the trumpet call of our honest convictions can ever lead us to take any but the very deepest interest in the welfare of those who will still, under all circumstances, be our brethren, or will prevent us from *laboring* for their welfare to the very best of our abilities. Everything that we will do in following where we see the torch of right lighting up the path, must lead us to love and respect those who differ from us—not to quarrel with them; on the contrary, in proportion as we are sincere, honest and pure, we will be full of love and sympathy for the narrower and wider circle of our fellow-men. We will love them, not with the haughty condescension of a superior towards an inferior, but with the love for one whom we are eager to clasp by the hand and call—brother. Then, when we believe what we practice and practice what we believe, the influence of religion will “like soft music steal upon our soul,” will infiltrate itself throughout our entire being, and be with us a cloud to shield us by day from the piercing rays of the sun and a pillar of fire to guide us through the darkness of the night.

Time bids me hasten to the close. From what has been said—imperfect though it be—it will be clear to you that in my opinion the question before us is one concerning *Jews rather than Judaism*, if, as I believe to be necessary in order to obtain a clear view of the situation, a distinction is to be made between the two. It is a question more especially of the young generation of American Jews, which is no longer rising, but before us. It is a question whether they will gain and maintain the respect and esteem of their fellow-men, whether they will lead pure and honorable lives, whether they will become useful members of society, with noble and lofty aspirations. There are, notably in the large cities, but also in the small ones, thousands upon thousands of Jews who come

under no religious influence whatever, for it is a fact to which it is useless to close our eyes, that the pulpit exercises but little influence to-day and scarcely any on the younger generation. This is a most serious matter, one to which no one, if he but reflect seriously, can be different. Jews have been noted heretofore for the many virtues and good qualities they possess. The purity of the family life and the sacredness of the marriage tie among them have been commented upon already by very ancient authors. We are to-day held up as a pattern to others in this respect. Their liberality and generosity are well-known to all. But virtues and good traits, it must be remembered, are not a spontaneous growth. They must be cultivated, and if they exist, they must be nurtured, or they are bound to perish.

It is for this reason—though not for this alone—that man needs religion. I care not what religion it is, but all of us need a religion. Men need a guide for their lives, need a means of developing their moral sense. Man needs a power that can give wings to his soul in its aspirations towards a higher sphere, that can elevate him to a higher conception of life and life's duties, and enable him to maintain it in sunshine and rain, in days of joy and nights of sorrow. We need religion because it corresponds to some innate craving, as is sufficiently proved by its universal existence under *some* form or other. To say that progress and civilization enable us to dispense with religion is absurd. Men need religion to-day as much as ever, nay, more than ever, for the changed conditions of life demand stronger moral forces to steer clear of dangers and strike the right course. Men need religion to influence their lives, but in order that this may be the case, their religion and life must beat in harmony. Theory and practice, belief and act, creed and deed must not clash with one another, but supplement each other. Let our deeds, including our religious practices, which are a part of our deeds, be in accordance with our creed, and let us *honestly* draw the consequences of our beliefs, whatever they be. If they lead us to an adherence to the doctrines of Judaism in the sense hitherto attached to them, let us act in accordance with them, clinging firmly and consistently to what we

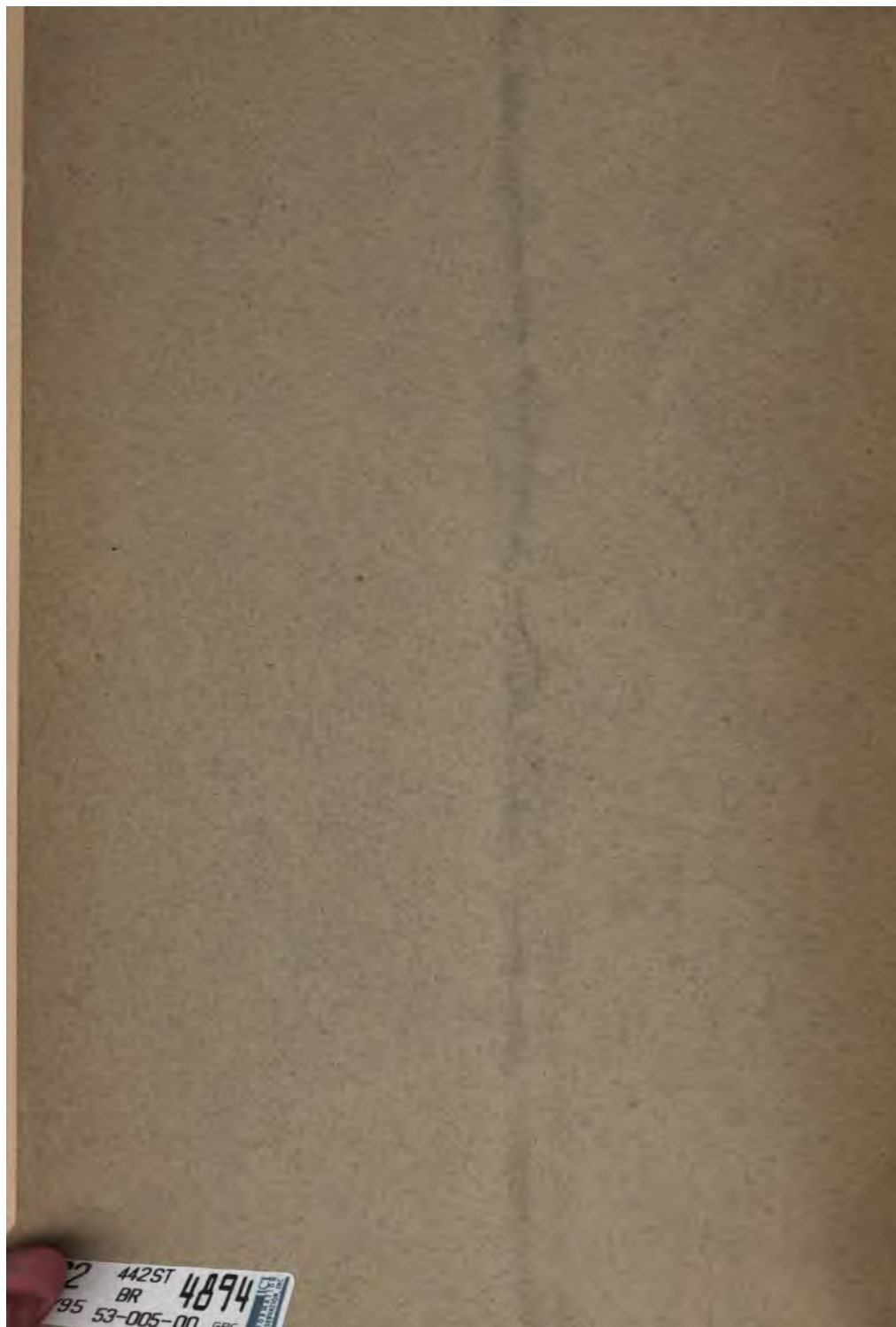
hold to be true and right; if they lead us to what is or appears to be a deviation from the traditional road, let us *no less* have the courage to follow our convictions, ready to uphold them with that same unflinching devotion with which our ancestors clung to theirs. We can do this with the assurance that we are doing our most sacred duty. No matter where we stand, we still need and can still have religion. But whatever we do, let us be consistent, let us be true to our beliefs by *acting them out*. Let us by all means in our power endeavor to find out what our convictions are, if we do not clearly know them, and then let us act in accordance with them. This is simple, and this alone is honest.

Unless we do this we have *no* religion, for a religion that exerts no influence upon us—and it can exert none, if theory and practice clash—is not worthy of the name. Religion is a sacred thing. Religious convictions and religious practices are not to be trifled with, or religion becomes a tool and a farce.

Our ancestors lived harmonious lives, were true to the convictions to which they clung while the winds of persecution and hatred, fanning the flames of fanaticism and intolerance, blew around them. We live in more auspicious times. We breathe the balmy air of freedom, and look aloft at the blue skies of independence. But we must maintain the honest spirit of our ancestors. We are acting in accordance with that spirit, if we follow as *firmly* our beliefs, whatever they be, as they did theirs.

I have thus endeavored to place before you the view of the situation to which the best thought and observation of which I am capable has led me. I have tried to do this clearly and impartially. If I have failed, my intentions are not at fault. I am not here this morning to advocate my own religious views. I have not even thought it proper to lay them before you, not because I have any hesitation in declaring them, but because this is not the occasion for it. Should an opportunity to do this present itself, or be granted, I will not be found wanting. If not, I will still endeavor to do in whatever capacity or calling, that which devolves upon all of us, whether in or out of the pulpit, to seek our happiness in living, not for ourselves alone, but also for others.





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